

This week I set out to write about the challenges our country faces in fighting back a mountain of debt. But as I started, a glance at the calendar reminded me that Father's Day was upon us.

I had to pause: even at a time when we struggle with big things as a nation, such as an uncertain financial future and military conflicts overseas, it is important to remember that at the base of America's strength – its families and communities – are strong mothers and fathers.

I have been blessed with the gift of fatherhood five times. I split my time between Washington and my home in Lincoln, which makes every moment with my daughters all the more special. I am reminded of the many families this year that will have to celebrate via Skype, a phone call, or an e-mail. In particular, the many U.S. military members come to mind, as they voluntarily endure long and difficult separations from their families for the security of our nation.

Fathers play an indispensable role in keeping families stable and safe. As they provide for their families, in partnership with their spouse, they help anchor their communities. They protect and nurture children and help shape the very character and spirit of our next generation of citizens and leaders. Passing on the ideals of respect, honor, duty, and civility from one generation of fathers to the next has helped to make America a great nation.

A recent op-ed written by professional basketball player Dwyane Wade about the importance of fatherhood urges all fathers to recognize "that their children need them and that it's their responsibility to be there for them. We have to step up as men and do our part. There are no excuses."

As some experience brokenness in their family situations, children may miss the instruction of a father in their lives. There are thankfully others who sacrificially and generously offer help with caring and uplifting spirits—a testament to the incredible capacity of the human spirit to uplift communities.

I have said before: politics is downstream from the culture. A renewed cultural spirit, based on the foundations of strong families and strong communities, can have a transformative impact on our political and civic systems. It is the strength of the most intimate form of community - the

family – that ultimately affects the strength of our nation.

I wish you all a Happy Father's Day.